



The Pacific Ocean is actually shrinking by about 1 inch every year. This shrinking is caused by a slow shift in the tectonic plate underlying the Pacific and Atlantic.



Not so 'funny', after all!

Alisha Taneja, GT Network

Those white-painted faces, a staunch red nose, oversized multi-coloured clothes. They were supposed to make us laugh, but instead they instilled in us an inexplicable fear. The fear is called 'Coulrophobia', also popularly known as fear of clowns. Clown - a figure which was created to be a comical relief, has become a symbol of horror and death. But what fuelled this transition? Read on to find out how the celebrated clown has evolved from being funny to scary!

The jest

Clowns have existed since times immemorial. A popular variant of the clown was 'jester', can be traced back to 2500 BC. The fun, mocking character was a popular feature of ancient theatre; his primary job being jumping in with silly breathers, in the middle of serious scenes. During the Italian theatre movement called Commedia de l'arte, the character of the jester eventually metamorphosed into a philosophical character, someone who could mock fun at the other important figures and speak out truths which no one dared to do in those times.

The history

Through the course of history, clowns have surfaced in various parts of the world, in various forms and names. For instance, ancient Egypt saw Pygmy clowns. Hieroglyphics depict them as making Pharaohs laugh. Yu Sze from China, the jester of Emperor Shih Huang-Ti, is another popular name that shows up in clown history. If folklore is to be believed, Yu Sze was the one who convinced the emperor against his plan of painting the Great Wall, which had by then already cost countless lives. Western Europe and Britain saw its own version of the clown - the 'pantomime clown' in the 18th and 19th century. It was during the 1500's that the word 'clown' first came in use during the Shakespearean theatre where the term was often used for foolish characters. While clown culture was picking up in other parts of the world, USA was oblivious to the clown until the 19th century.

The picking point

Though clowns picked up in different countries at different times, it was the 19th century that saw them in prime spots. During the 19th century, the circus clowns, which were an integral part of the circus troupe, became extremely popular among the masses. Characters like 'Auguste' and 'Coco' became almost iconic in the late 1920's - 1930's. The trend saw a rise in America in the 1960's when clowns and jokers became an indispensable part of every birthday party, and even were a hit in the media. TV Shows where clown characters like 'Bozo, the clown' and iconic figures like Ronald McDonald took the industry by storm. In fact, Bozo the Clown was so popular that by the 1960's there was a 10-year wait for tickets to his show.

The dipping point

Just like their rise, the downfall of clowns was recorded at different points in history across different parts of the world. Joseph Grimaldi, London's most popular pantomime comic player had a rather dark life. His wife died at the time of childbirth and he led the life of a penniless alcoholic. Jean-Gaspard Debureau, who went by the name Pierrot, Paris' popular pantomime clown, gravely injured a boy with a walking stick. As the dark lives of these men surfaced from behind the happily painted face, a general resentment against clowns started brewing. The shifting point from funny to scary for America came when the story of John Wayne Gacy, a serial



killer, who masqueraded as clown came to light. He was unveiled by newspapers as the 'Killer Clown' in the 1970's.


The fear

Once the scary side of clown had been unravelled, there was no looking back from the road of fear. Hollywood exploited the concept of scary clowns to the fullest; the 1982 movie 'Poltergeist' and 1988 movie 'Killer Clowns from Outer space' are some examples. However, it was the movie 'It' by Stephen King that actually established clown as a creepy character. The movie's antagonist Penny-

Heath Ledger who played the iconic Joker in the Batman series could not receive his Oscar due to his early demise. The cult Bollywood movie 'Mera Naam Joker' too talks of the sad lives led by clown and jokers.

The fear forever

In the modern era, when the figure of the scary clown has been normalised by Hollywood and TV shows such as the classic villain Joker in the Batman series, or even Twisty the Clown from American Horror Story Season 4, it is only natural that the new generation has been infused with a different perspective, that it is difficult for them to believe that their predecessors were actually funny. Reported crimes perpetrated by people dressed up as clowns doesn't seem to help the case either. 2016 saw numerous incidents being reported where individuals masqueraded as clowns kidnapped children or chased people with knives, leading to the ban on clown costumes in many countries during the celebration of festivals like Halloween and costume parties.

It is unfortunate that a character aimed for creating few harmless laughs turned into one of the most dreaded faces. This sure is not so funny, after all. 

Bad 'Humour'

- *Coulrophobia is a real psychological disorder, the seeds of which are planted in young children at a naive age, and they are mostly never able to completely grow out of their fear.*
- *It works on the concepts of masks, we humans understand that any mask hides the true identity of a person, and we view clowns as permanently masked characters, whose real feelings are unknown, hidden behind their permanent pasted silly smiles and antics.*
- *Being 'creeped out' on seeing clowns is a natural emotional response to the ambiguity about the presence of threats that alerts people to remain vigilant during times of uncertainty, according to a Knox College study on the nature of creepiness.*